

OVERWINTERING GERANIUMS

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If you brought geraniums indoors to overwinter for replanting next spring, here are a few tips to increase success.

Geraniums, or true Pelargoniums, are not hardy to Nebraska winters and will die if exposed to frost. True geraniums, sold as hardy geraniums, are winter hardy and will survive outdoors.

If brought indoors before a freeze, Pelargoniums, or what most people call geraniums and grow as annual flowers in containers or garden beds, can be overwintered as potted plants or bare root.

To overwinter as potted plants, leave geraniums in the container they are in or pot them into a new container as needed. Water each plant thoroughly and then place geraniums in a sunny window or under artificial lighting.

Geraniums overwinter best if kept in a cool location with daytime temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. An unheated basement, bedroom or enclosed porch are good locations. Ideally, the overnight temperature should be even cooler.

Only water geraniums about once every two weeks and do not fertilize during winter. Most houseplants are not actively growing during winter and fertilization is not recommended from November through March.

Overwintering geraniums usually become tall and spindly by late winter. At this stage, some people give up on them and toss them out. Instead, prune the plants back by one-half to two-thirds in March. Water more often, keeping the soil uniformly moist but not soggy, and begin to fertilize.

Another way to overwinter geraniums is the bare root method. After carefully digging plants, gently shake loose soil from the plant's roots. It is fine to leave some soil adhering to roots.

Next, place one or two plants in a large paper bag. Close the bag and store in a cool, 45 to 50 degree Fahrenheit, dry location. Again, an unheated basement, bedroom or enclosed porch are good locations.

An alternate method is to hang the plants upside down in a cool, fairly dry location. Old root cellars are ideal for this and so most people use the paper sack method instead.

When overwintered as bare root, the foliage and shoot tips will die. In March, remove all shriveled, dead leaves and prune stems back to firm, green stem tissue.

After pruning, pot the plants up and water thoroughly. Place potted geraniums in a sunny window or under artificial lighting, keep the soil moist and fertilize about once a month.

Geraniums that survive the winter, sometimes they dry out too much and do not survive; and plants which are pruned and potted in March can develop into attractive plants to replant outdoors in May.

Reasons for overwintering tender perennials include saving money or saving a favorite variety. Other plants this can be done with include coleus, impatiens, begonias, asparagus fern and spider plant. These are best overwintered as potted plants.

Lantana, Abutilon and fiber-optic grass can also be overwintered but these plants can be more challenging.